

have been in a place different from that of the traditionally held for Gilead (in the northern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan). In addition, the traditional understanding is that north to the Gilead is the land of **בשן** - “**Bashan**.” However, we do not hear here the Jacob or Laban crossed the Bashan on their way to the Gilead. In fact the **בשן** - “**Bashan**” is not mentioned even once in the Book of Genesis.

Several biblical figures were named Gilead. In the Book of Numbers we read about **גלעד בן-מכיר בן-מנשה** - “**Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh**” (Num 27:1; see also: Num 26:29, 30; 36:1; Jos 17:1, 3; 1 Ch 2:21, 23; 7:14, 17). From the Book of Judges we learn that Jephthah’s father was also named **גלעד** - “**Gilead**” (Jud 11:1, 2), and in the Book of Chronicles we read about **ירוח בן-גלעד בן-מיכאל** - “**Jaroah, the son of Gilead, the son of Michael**” (1 Ch 5:14).

In addition, several named (**יאיר** - “**Jair**”, Jud 10:3; **יפתח** - “**Jephthah**”, Jud 11:1, 40; 12:7; and **ברזילי** - “**Barzillai**”, 2 Sam 17:27; 19:32; 1 Ki 2:7; Ezr 2:61; Neh 7:63), and unnamed (2 Ki 15:25) persons were described as “Gileadites.”

Yet the content of many other biblical verses, that mention **גלעד** - “**Gilead**”, indicates that it was also a place-name. Furthermore, as with personal names, there might have been several different Gileads.

We read about: **ארץ גלעד** - “**the land of Gilead**” (Num 32:1, 29; Jos 17:5, 6; 22:9, 13, 15; Jud 10:4; 20:1; 2 Sam 17:26; 1 Ki 4:19; 2 Ki 10:33; Zec 10:10; 1 Ch 2:22; 5:9); **הר גלעד** - “**Mountain of Gilead**” (Gen 31:21, 23, 25; Jud 7:3; Can 4:1); **מצפה גלעד** - “**Mizpeh of Gilead**” (Jud 11:29); and **ערי גלעד** - “**the cities of Gilead**” (Num 32:26; Jos 13:25; Jud 12:7).

We also encounter: **אנשי גלעד** - “**the men of Gilead**” (Jud 12:4, 5); **ישבי גלעד** - “**the inhabitants of Gilead**” (Jud 10:18; 11:80); **תושבי גלעד** - “**the settlers of Gilead**” (1 Ki 17:1); **זקני גלעד** - “**the elders of Gilead**” (Jud 11:5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11); and **שרי גלעד** - “**the princes of Gilead**” (Jud 10:18).

A place named **רמת גלעד** - “**Ramoth-gilead**” is mentioned in the Bible twenty-four times (Deu 4:43; Jos 20:8; 21:36; 1 Ki 4:13; 22:3, 4, 6, 12, 15, 20, 29; 2 Ki 8:28; 9:1, 4, 14; 1 Ch 6:65; 2 Ch 18:2, 3, 5, 11, 14, 19, 28; 22:5).

We also read in the Bible about a place named **יביש גלעד** - “**Jabesh-gilead**.” It appears in twelve verses (Jud 21:8, 9, 10, 12, 14; 1 Sam 11:1, 9; 31:11; 2 Sam 2:4, 5; 21:12; 1 Ch 10:11).

Except for the first Book of Chronicles that mentions once **רמת גלעד** - “**Ramoth-gilead**” (1 Ch 6:65 which is a copy of Jos 21:36), and once **יביש גלעד** - “**Jabesh-gilead**” (1 Ch 10:11 which is a copy of 1 Sam 31:11), **יביש גלעד** - “**Jabesh-gilead**” appears only in Biblical books that do not mention **רמת גלעד** - “**Ramoth-gilead**” and vice-versa. We may therefore wonder whether “**Ramoth-gilead**” and “**Jabesh-gilead**” were in the same land of Gilead.

The impression gained from reading several biblical verses is that not far from Gilead was the region of **בשן** - "**Bashan**." In fact, in fifteen biblical verses we find both Gilead and Bashan (Deu 3:10, 13; 4:43; Jos 12:5; 13:11, 31; 17:1, 5; 20:8; 1 Ki 4:13, 19; 2 Ki 10:33; Jer 3:18; Mic 7:14; 1 Ch 5:16).

Unlike Gilead, Bashan does not appear as a personal name, nor do we hear about any biblical "Bashanites." While in twenty (out of a total of 51) verses that mentions Bashan we read about its king - **עוג** - "Og" (Num 21:33; 32:33; Deu 1:4; 3:1, 3, 4, 10, 11, 13; 4:47; 29:6; Jos 9:10; 12:4; 13:12, 30, 31; 1 Ki 4:19; Ps 135:11; 136:20; Neh 9:22), we never hear about a "king of Gilead."

In the Books of Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel, and 2nd Chronicles, there are forty-six verses that refer to "Gilead", yet there is not even a single mention of "Bashan" in these books. The lack of association between Gilead and Bashan in several books of the Bible could further support the view that there were several geographical regions that had the name Gilead, but only one of them might have been near Bashan.

According to the Book of Numbers, at the time when the Israelites, who came out of Egypt were reaching the land of Moab, Moab already had lost part of its territory that was beyond the Arnon stream, to the Amorite king Sihon (Num 21:26).

We also read that at that time: **כי ארנון גבול מואב, בין מואב ובין האמרי** - "**For Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites**" (Num 21:13).

The Amorite King Sihon's land stretched from there all the way to the Jabbok stream. Beyond the Jabbok was the land of the Ammonites (Num 21:24). It appears that Moab at that time was so weak that its king believed that the Israelites could:

עתה ילחנו הקהל את-כל-סביבתינו, כלחך השור את ירק השדה;
"**Now will this multitude lick up all that is round about us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field**" (Num 22:4).

In fact we are told: **ויסעו בני ישראל; ויחנו בערבות מואב, מעבר לירדן ירחו** - "**And the children of Israel journeyed, and pitched in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho**" (Num 22:1). They will stay there long enough to become partially assimilated with the Moabites, and later from there they will cross the Jordan to Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

We are told that the Israelites **נסעו, ויחנו מעבר ארנון אשר במדבר** - "**they journeyed, and pitched on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness**" (Num 21:13).

King Sihon apparently saw this gathering as an imminent threat to his land:

ויאסף סיחון את-כל-עמו ויצא לקראת ישראל המדברה, ויבא יהצה; וילחם בישראל.
"**And Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness, and came to Jahaz; and he fought against Israel**" (Num 21:23; see also: Jud 11:20).

Yet it seems that King Sihon's people were no match for the Israelites:

ויכהו ישראל לפי-חרב; ויירש את-ארצו מארנן עד-יבק

“And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok” (Num 21:24).

ויקח ישראל את כל-הערים האלה; וישב ישראל בכל-ערי האמרי, בחשבון ובכל-בנתיה.

“And Israel took all these cities; and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the towns thereof” (Num 21:25).

וישב ישראל בארץ האמרי.

“And Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites” (Num 21:31).

Now we hear that Moses sent spies to an Amorite place named **יעזר** - “**Jazer**”, and that soon after that the Israelites captured it and its villages (Num 21:32).

Probably from there:

ויפנו ויעלו דרך הבשן; ויצא עוג מלך-הבשן לקראתם הוא וכל-עמו למלחמה-אדרעי.

“And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan; and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei” (Num 21:33).

It appears that Og's people were also not strong enough to block the Israelites:

ויכו אותו ואת-בניו ואת-כל-עמו עד-בלתי השאיר-לו שריד; ויירשו את-ארצו.

“So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him remaining; and they possessed his land” (Num 21:35).

It is not clear, whether for reaching the Bashan the Israelites had to go through Jazer. In fact this account does not tell us where Bashan was. We should also notice that Gilead was not mentioned here.

We also read in the Book of Numbers:

ויבאו בני-גד ובני ראובן; ויאמרו אל-משה ואל-אלעזר הכהן ואל-נשיאי העדה לאמר.

עטרות ודיבן ויעזר ונמרה, וחשבון ואלעלה, ושבם ונבו, ובען.

הארץ אשר הכה יהוה לפני עדת ישראל-ארץ מקנה הוא; ולעבדיך מקנה.

“And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and to the princes of the congregation, saying:

Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Sebam, and Nebo, and Beon:

The land which *YHWH* smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle” (Num 32:2-4).

We previously read that Hesbon and Jazer, were taken from the Amorites under the leadership of Moses. From the itinerary of all the journeys of the Israelites from Egypt to the “plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho” (Num 33:1-49), we learn that on their way the Israelites “**pitched in Dibon-gad**” and “**pitched in the mountains of Abarim, in front of Nebo**” (Num 33:45-47).

The Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah indicated that many of these place-names were actually part of Moab (Is 15:2, 4; 16:8, 9; Jer 48:1, 22, 32, 34). We may therefore conclude that the tribes of Gad and Reuben asked Moses and the leaders of Israel to give them several locations in and near Moab, and in the lands just conquered by Moses and the Israelites from the Amorites. We should also notice that the Gilead, the Bashan, or any of their towns are not mentioned here.

Yet in the previous verse we read:

ומקנה רב היה לבני ראובן ולבני-גד-עצום מאד; ויראו את-ארץ יעזר, ואת-ארץ גלעד, והנה המקום מקום מקנה.

“Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle; and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle” (Num 32:1).

Here we have to wonder, how the Reubenites and the Gadatians could see the “Land of Gilead” as we have not yet heard that it was conquered. We may also question how the Reubenites and the Gadatians could ask for a land that will be conquered by people from another tribe. Furthermore, in the verses that follow the people of these tribes do not mention a single locality that was in Gilead and in fact we do not hear that Moses gave them the land of Gilead. Lastly, in this verse it is said: “**they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold the place was a place for cattle.**” Yet if indeed there were two lands that were fit for cattle, we should have read “the places were places for cattle.” We may therefore suspect that here **ואת-ארץ גלעד** - “and the land of Gilead” is an insertion by a late and not too well informed scribe.

Thirty-eight verses later we read:

וילכו בני מכיר בן-מנשה גלעדה-וילכדה; ויורש את-האמרי אשר-בה. ויתן משה את-הגלעד למכיר בן-מנשה; וישב בה.

“And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, and took it, and dispossessed the Amorites that were therein.

And Moses gave Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh; and he dwelt therein” (Num 32:39-40).

We are not told why of all the Manasseh tribe (in fact, of all of Israel) only the sons of Machir went to capture Gilead, and whether this action was authorized by Moses. We are also not informed from where the sons of Machir came, where this Gilead was, or who its inhabitants were. We should also notice that the Bashan is not mentioned in this account. It is also quite odd that the sons of Machir captured a location that carried a name identical to that of a son of Machir (Num 26:29; 27:1).

Another problematic verse in this chapter:

ויתן להם משה לבני-גד ולבני ראובן ולחצי שבט מנשה בן-יוסף, את-ממלכת סיוח מלך האמרי, ואת-ממלכת עוג מלך הבשן: הארץ לעריה בגבלת-ערי הארץ סביב.

“And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, according to the cities thereof with their borders, even the cities of the land round about” (Num 32:33; see also: Jos 12:6).

We have not heard that anyone of these tribes asked for “**the kingdom of Og king of Bashan**” and we have to wonder why it was awarded to them. We should also notice that the Gilead is not mentioned here. While we previously heard about **בני מכיר בן-מנשה** - “**the children of Machir the son of Manasseh**”, we may question (if or) why they are now referred to as: **חצי שבט מנשה בן-יוסף** - “**the half-tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph.**”

The Book of Deuteronomy, which most scholars believe was written several centuries later, is fashioned as Moses’ historical account of his biography as the leaders of the Israelites. Although the accounts about Moses’ military campaigns presented here are mostly similar to those found in the Book of Numbers, there are also some significant disparities.

In the Book of Numbers we read that the battle against Sihon the King of Heshbon and his people resulted in: “**And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok**” (Num 21:24).

Yet in the Book of Deuteronomy we are told:

מערער אשר על-שפת-נחל ארנן והעיר אשר בנחל ועד-הגלעד, לא היתה קריה אשר שגבה ממנו: את-הכל נתן יהוה אלהינו לפנינו.

“**From Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon, and from the city that is in the valley, even to Gilead, there was not a city too high for us: YHWH our God delivered up all before us**” (Deu 2:36).

Yet in the Book of Numbers, we were not told that the conquest of Gilead was part of the war with the Amorite king Sihon, but: “**the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, and took it**” (Num 32:39). In addition, although in the Book of Numbers we read that the campaign indeed started by crossing the Arnon stream, yet the town of Aroer, was not mentioned there.

It is also not clear why we do not find in the Book of Deuteronomy any mention about Moses next campaign against the Amorites of Iazer (Num 21:32).

In regard to the war against Og the King of Bashan, we read in the Book of Deuteronomy:

ונפן ונעל דרך הבשן; ויצא עוג מלך-הבשן לקראתנו הוא וכל-עמו למלחמה-אדרעי.

“**Then we turned, and went up the way to Bashan; and Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, unto battle at Edrei**” (Deu 3:1).

While the information here is identical to that which we read in the Book of Numbers (Num 21:33), we also read in the Book of Deuteronomy that Moses smote:

את סיחן מלך האמרי, אשר יושב בחשבון-ואת עוג מלך הבשן, אשר-יושב בעשתרת, באדרעי.

“**Sihon the king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtaroth, at Edrei**” (Deu 1:4; see also: Jos 12:4; 13:12).

It is likely that as Heshbon was the capital of Sihon, Ashtaroth was the capital of Og. However,

The description of Moses war against Og suggests that Edrei was a border town close to the place where the Israelites invaded the Land of Bashan, and therefore, its mention here appears erroneous.

We read in the Book of Deuteronomy about the outcome of the battle against Og:

ונלכד את-כל-עריו בעת ההוא-לא היתה קריה אשר לא-לקחנו מאתם: ששים עיר כל-חבל ארגב, ממלכת עוג בבשן.

כל-אלה ערים בצרת, חומה גבהה-דלתים ובריח: לבד מערי הפרזי הרבה מאד.

“And we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city which we took not from them; threescore cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan.

All these were fortified cities, with high walls, gates, and bars; beside the unwalled towns a great many” (Deu 3:4-5; see also: Jos 13:30).

The description here of the **“kingdom of Og in Bashan”** is comparable to those of the ancient Middle - East empires, yet there is no extra-biblical evidence for the existence of such a major kingdom. It is almost incomprehensible that a war effort that resulted in the conquest of sixty fortified cities (a military campaign similar in magnitude to the more successful war expeditions of the kings of Egypt, Assyria or the Hittites) will receive in the Book of Numbers the meek remark: **“So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him remaining; and they possessed his land”** (Num 21:35). Furthermore, of all these towns the Book of Deuteronomy mentions only: **“Salcah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan”** (Deu 3:10; see also: Jos 12:5; 13:11). In the Book of Joshua we read: **“and Ashtaroth, and Edrei, the cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan”** (Jos 13:31). We should also notice that the Book of Numbers never mentions the **“region of Argob”** or **“Salcah.”**

In the Book of Numbers, immediately after the conquest of the Gilead we read:

ויאיר בן-מנשה הלך וילכד את-חותיהם; ויקרא אתהן חות יאיר.

“And Jair the son of Manasseh went and took the villages thereof, and called them Havvoth-jair” (Num 32:41).

Yet in the Book of Deuteronomy we read:

יאיר בן-מנשה לקח את-כל-חבל ארגב, עד-גבול הגשורי והמעכתי; ויקרא אתם על-שמו את-הבשן חות יאיר, עד היום הזה.

“Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob, to the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and called them, even Bashan, after his own name, Havvoth-jair, to this day” (Deu 3:41; Jos 13:11).

A somewhat similar event appears in the Book of Judges:

ויקם אחריו יאיר הגלעדי; וישפט את-ישראל עשרים ושתים שנה. ויהי-לו שלשים בנים רכבים על-שלשים עירים, ושלשים עירים להם; להם יקראו חות יאיר, עד היום הזה, אשר בארץ הגלעד.

“And after him arose Jair, the Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty and two years.

And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havvoth-jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead” (Jud 10:3-4).

Therefore it seems that while the Books of Numbers and Judges indicate that **חות יאיר** - **“Havvoth-jair”** were in the Gilead, the writer of the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that it was in the region of Argob in the Bashan.

The writer of the Book of Kings offers a solution to this discrepancy by stating:

בן-גבר ברמת גלעד; לו חות יאיר בן-מנשה אשר בגלעד, לו חבל ארגב אשר בבשן-ששים ערים גדלות חומה ובריח נחשת.

“The son of Geber, in Ramoth-gilead; to him pertained the villages of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; even to him pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brazen bars” (1 Ki 4:13).

Similarly to verse 32:40 of the Book of Numbers, we hear in the Book of Deuteronomy Moses saying: **“And I gave Gilead to Machir” (Deu 3:15).**

Yet three verses earlier we read:

מערער אשר-על-נחל ארנון, וחצי הר-הגלעד ועריו-נתתי לראובני ולגדי. ויתר הגלעד וכל-הבשן ממלכת עוג-נתתי לחצי שבט המנשה: כל חבל הארגב “from Aroer, which is by the valley of Arnon, and half the hill-country of Gilead, and the cities thereof, gave I to the Reubenites and to the Gadites; And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, gave I to the half-tribe of Manasseh; all the region of Argob” (Deu 3:12-13).

We also read in this chapter:

ולראובני ולגדי נתתי מן-הגלעד ועד-נחל ארנון, תוך הנחל, וגבל-ועד יבק הנחל, גבול בני עמון. והערבה, והירדן וגבל-מכנרת ועד ים הערבה ים המלח, תחת אשדת הפסגה מזרחה. “And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites I gave from Gilead even to the valley of Arnon, the middle of the valley for a border; even to the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon; The Arabah also, the Jordan being the border thereof, from Chinnereth even to the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, under the slopes of Pisgah eastward” (Deu 3:16-17; see also: Jos 12:2-3).

One way to view this contradictory information is to assume that the writer of the Book of Deuteronomy assembled all the information about the lands east of the Jordan River that he found in the Books of Numbers and Joshua without passing his judgment about their validity.

One of the major hurdles to the understanding of the geography of these lands stems from the fact that unlike the southern border of the Land of Ammonites (which is the stream of Jabbok) there is no information in the Bible about its northern border, or about the land that was north to that border.

We read in the Book of Deuteronomy:

ונקה בעת ההוא את-הארץ מיד שני מלכי האמרי אשר בעבר הירדן-מנחל ארנון עד-הר חרמון.

“And we took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of Arnon to mount Hermon” (Deu 3:8; see also: Jos 12:1).

Although this verse tells us for the first time that King Og was in fact an Amorite, and that his kingdom reached north all the way to Mount Hermon, it does not tell us where its southern border was. It is not clear whether this border separated Bashan from the Land of Iazer, the Land of Gilead or the Land of the Ammonites.



Furthermore, this description of the kingdom of Og suggests that it included the area that currently is named the “Golan Heights.” The natural southern border of the “Golan Heights” is the Yarmuk River, which forms the border between Syria and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.



The Yarmuk River at the bottom of a canyon-type valley

At the bottom of a steep canyon-type valley, the 47 mi long Yarmuk River, which delivers 460 million cubic meters of water per year, is traditionally believed to be the border between the Gilead (southern side), and Bashan (north to this river). Although considerably larger than the Arnon and Jabbok streams, there is no mention in the Bible of a river or a valley as the border between the Gilead and the Bashan. Therefore, we have to reconsider the location of the biblical Gilead and Bashan.

The Book of Judges describes an event from the days of the Judge Jephthah which may give us a clue about the location of Gilead.

We read in the Book of Judges:

ויצעקו בני עמון, ויחנו בגלעד; ויאספו בני ישראל, ויחנו במצפה. ויאמרו העם שרי גלעד, איש אל-רעהו, מי האיש אשר יחל להלחם בבני עמון-יהיה לראש, לכל ישרי גלעד.

“Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpah. And the people, (and) the princes of Gilead, said one to another: What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead” (Jud 10:17-18).

וישלח יפתח מלאכים אל-מלך בני-עמון לאמר: מה-לי ולך, כי-באת אלי להלחם בארצי. ויאמר מלך בני-עמון אל-מלאכי יפתח, כי-לקח ישראל את-ארצי בעלותו ממצרים, מארנון ועד-היבק, ועד-הירדן; ועתה השיבה אתהן בשלום.

“And Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the children of Ammon, saying: What have you to do with me, that thou are coming to me to fight against my land? And the king of the children of Ammon answered to the messengers of Jephthah: Because Israel took away my land, when he came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon even to the Jabbok, and to the Jordan; now therefore restore those cities peaceably” (Jud 11:12-13).

These verses suggest that the Ammonites were gathering to fight for Gilead which they believed was taken from them three hundred years earlier when the Israelites conquered the land between the Arnon and the Jabbok streams.

The repeated attempt of the Ammonites to reclaim the Land of Gilead apparently resonates with the words of the Prophet Amos:

כה אמר יהוה, על-שלשה פשעי בני-עמון, ועל-ארבעה לא אשיבנו: על-בקעם הרות הגלעד, למען הרחיב את-גבולם.

והצתי אש בחומת רבה, ואכלה ארמנותיה; בתרועה ביום מלחמה, בסער ביום סופה. והלך מלכם בגולה; הוא ושריו יחדו, אמר יהוה.

“Thus said YHWH: For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, yea, for four, I will not reverse it: because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border.

So will I kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind;

And their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together, said YHWH⁷ (Am 1:13-15).

The Ammonites claim of the Gilead may also explain why in the Book of Samuel we read:

ויעל נחש העמוני, ויחן על-יביש גלעד

“Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead” (1 Sam 11:1)

We are also told in this account that the elders of Gilead sent messengers to Saul who was in Gibeah (1 Sam 11:4). Saul gathered the Israelites in Bezek (1 Sam 11:8) and then:

ויהי ממחרת וישם שאול את-העם שלשה ראשים, ויבאו בתוך-המחנה באשמרת הבקר, ויכו את-עמון עד-חם היום; ויהי הנשארים ויפצו, ולא נשארו-בם שנים יחד.

“And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and smote the Ammonites until the heat of the day; and it came to pass, that they that remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together” (1 Sam 11:11).

As the Ammonite's camp was then in Gilead, it appears that Saul's army attacked them there. However, as Bezek was in the land of Judah (Jud 1:4), it is unlikely that Saul could have marched his army from there to the northern part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in one day. We have therefore to conclude that indeed the Land of Gilead must have been located south of the Land of the Ammonites.

We also read in the Book of Samuel that when David was escaping from Absalom and his men:

ויקם דוד וכל-העם אשר אתו, ויעברו את-הירדן: עד-אור הבקר, עד-אחד לא נעדר, אשר לא-עבר את-הירדן.

“Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over the Jordan; by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over the Jordan” (2 Sam 17:22).

ודוד בא מחנימה; ואבשלם עבר את-הירדן-הוא, וכל-איש ישראל עמו.

“And David was come to Mahanaim, Absalom passed over the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him” (2 Sam 17:24).

ויהי כבוא דוד מחנימה; ושבי בן-נחש מרבת בני-עמון, ומכיר בן-עמיאל מלא דבר, וברזלי הגלעדי מרגלים.

[] משכב וספות וכלי יוצר, וחטים ושערים וקמח וקלי, ופול ועדשים, וקלי. ודבש וחמאה, וצאן ושפות בקר, הגישו לדוד ולעם אשר-אתו, לאכול: כי אמרו-העם רעב ועיף וצמא במדבר.

“And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim;

[brought] beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and meal, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse;

And honey, and curd, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat; for they said: The people is hungry, and faint, and thirsty, in the wilderness” (2 Sam 17:27-29).

ויחן ישראל ואבשלם, ארץ הגלעד.

“And Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead” (2 Sam 17:26).

If “Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon” brought supplies to David who was in Mahanaim, it is evident that David had not crossed the Land of the Ammonites on his way there. We may therefore conclude that Mahanaim was located south of the Land of the Ammonites. Furthermore, if Mahanaim was in Gilead (Jos 21:36), then indeed Gilead itself must have been located south to the Land of the Ammonites.

If this information is correct, then indeed the Gilead and the Bashan (which is never mentioned in the Books of Samuel) did not share a common border. It then appears that the Israelites could have reached the Bashan through the Land of Iazer (Num 21:32) or moved north by detouring the Land of the Ammonites. Alternatively, the location of Land of Bashan was not where the Golan Heights is today, but in another place.



Moses on Mount Nebo. By Thomas Nast (1840-1902)

In the Book of Deuteronomy we also read:

**ויעל משה מערבת מואב אל-הר נבו ראש הפסגה אשר על-פני ירחו; ויראהו יהוה את-כל-
הארץ את-הגלעד עד-דן.**

ואת-כל-נפתלי, ואת-ארץ אפרים ומנשה; ואת-כל-ארץ יהודה, עד היס האחרון

ואת-הנגב, ואת-הככר בקעת ירחו עיר התמרים-עד-צער.

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And *YHWH* showed him all the land, the Gilead as far as Dan; And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the hinder sea; And the South, and the Plain, and the valley of Jericho the city of palm-trees, as far as Zoar” (Deu 34:1-3).

If Moses could have seen from Mount Nebo (near Jericho) the Land of Gilead, then its location could not have been in the northern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. However, if indeed Gilead was located south of the Jabbok stream, then it would have been more likely that Moses saw it from Mount Nebo. We should also notice that it was not claimed here that Moses saw from Mount Nebo the **בשן** - “**Bashan**.”

In the Book of Judges we read:

וכל-מדין ועמלק ובני-קדם נאספו יחדו; ויעברו ויחנו בעמק יזרעאל.

“Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east assembled themselves together; and they passed over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel” (Jud 6:33).

וישכם ירבעל הוא גדעון וכל-העם אשר אתו, ויחנו על-עין חרד; ומחנה מדין היה-לו מצפון, מגבעת המורה בעמק.

“And Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside En-harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them, by Gibeath-moreh, in the valley” (Jud 7:1).

Now God instruct Gideon:

קרא נא באזני העם לאמר, מי-ירא וחרד, ישב ויצפר מהר הגלעד;

“Now therefore make proclamation in the ears of the people, saying: Whosoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead” (Jud 7:3).

It is not clear how the Greek (and English) translators determined that the Hapax legomenon **יצפר** (*itspor*) means “depart early.” It is suggested that **יצפר** (*itspor*) is a letter-substitution error of **יצפה** (*itspeh*) - “will observe” (e.g. 2 Sam 13:34; 18:26; 2 Ki 9:17; Is 21:6; Jer 48:19).

Notwithstanding, this “**Mount Gilead**” must have been near the Valley of Jezreel and not in the northern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. We should also remember that not only that **בשן** - “**Bashan**” is not mentioned in this account, in fact it does not appear even once in the Book of Judges.

In the Book of Kings we read that in the days of the Israelite king Baasa (c. 908-885 BC), the Aramean king “Ben-hadad, the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Aram, that dwelt at Damascus”, after he received gold and silver from Asa the king of Judah:

וישלח את-שרי החילים אשר-לו על-ערי ישראל, ויך את-עיון ואת-דן, ואת אבל בית-מעכה; ואת כל-כנרות על כל-ארץ נפתלי.

“And he sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-beth-maacah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali” (1 Ki 15:20).

This verse indicates that already in the ninth century BC, Northern Canaan was dominated by the Arameans. Several of the place names that are mentioned here appear also in verse 2 Ki 15:29. The fact that Gilead is mentioned in verse 2 Ki 15:29, suggests that the Aramean influence may have reached also the Gilead.

It appears that the reason for King Asa's action was:

**ומלחמה היתה בין אסא, ובין בעשא מלך-ישראל-כל-ימיהם.
ויעל בעשא מלך-ישראל על-יהודה, ויבן את-הרמה-לבלתי תת יצא ובא לאסא מלך יהודה.
“And there was war between Asa and Baasa king of Israel all their days.**

And Baasa king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah” (1 Ki 15:16-17).

We do not know much about the location of this “Ramah.” It could have been in Mount Ephraim (e.g. Jud 4:5; 1 Sam 1:1) or in the Land of Naphtali (Jos 19:36), or even in the Gilead (e.g. 2 Ki 8:28-29; 2 Ch 22:6). In the Book of Chronicles we read the name: **רמות גלעד - Ramoth-gilead**” (2 Ch 22:5), yet the Greek translator wrote here: “Rama Galaad.”

It appears that the interest of the Arameans in the lands south of Damascus was not a onetime event, and we read that in the days of the Israelite king Ahab (c. 873- 852 BC):

ובן-הדד מלך-ארם קבץ את-כל-חילו, ושלשים ושנים מלך אתו, וסוס ורכב; ויעל ויצר על-שמרון, וילחם בה.

“And Ben-hadad the king of Aram gathered all his host together; and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses and chariots; and he went up and besieged Samaria, and fought against it” (1 Ki 20:1).

**ויצא מלך ישראל, ויך את-הסוס ואת-הרכב, והכה בארם מכה גדולה.
ויגש הנביא אל-מלך ישראל, ויאמר לו לך התחזק, ודע וראה את אשר-תעשה: כי לתשובת השנה, מלך ארם עלה עליך.**

“And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Arameans with a great slaughter.

And the prophet came near to the king of Israel, and said unto him: Go, strengthen yourself, and mark, and see what you do; for at the return of the year the king of Aram will come up against you” (1 Ki 20:21-22).

**ויהי לתשובת השנה, ויפקד בן-הדד את-ארם; ויעל אפקה למלחמה עם-ישראל.
“And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel” (1 Ki 20:26).**

**ויכו בני-ישראל את-ארם מאה-אלף רגלי, ביום אחד.
וינסו הנותרים אפקה, אל-העיר, ותפל החומה על-עשרים ושבעה אלף איש הנותרים; ובן-הדד נס, ויבא אל-העיר חדר בחדר.**

“And the children of Israel slew of the Arameans a hundred thousand footmen in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and the wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand men that were left. And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber” (1 Ki 20:29-30).

In the peace treaty signed after this battle Ben-hadad told Ahab:

ויאמר אליו הערים אשר-לקח-אבי מאת אביך אשיב, וחצות תשים לך בדמשק כאשר-שם אבי בשמרון, ואני בברית אשלחך; ויכרת-לו ברית וישלחהו.

“And [Ben-hadad] said to him: The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you shall make streets for you in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. And I [said Ahab,] will let you go with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and let him go” (1 Ki 20:34).

This information apparently is not about the days of Ahab’s father - Omri (c. 884- 873BC), but relates to King Baasa’s time. Furthermore, it seems (as we will soon hear) that for one reason or another **רמת גלעד** - **“Ramoth-gilead”** was not included in this deal.

Now we hear King Ahab:

ויאמר מלך-ישראל אל-עבדיו, הידעתם כי-לנו רמת גלעד; ואנחנו מחשים-מקחת אתה מיד מלך ארם.

“And the king of Israel said unto his servants: Know you that Ramoth-gilead is ours, and we are still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Aram?” (1 Ki 22:3).

Three years after the previous battle with the Arameans (1 Ki 22:1), with the help of the king of Judah - Jehoshaphat, yet against the advice of the Prophet Micaiah the son of Imlah (1 Ki 22:17; see also: 2 Ch 18:16), Ahab went to Ramoth-Gilead to fight with the Arameans (1 Ki 22:29). While it is not clear whether Ahab managed to take Ramoth-Gilead, we are told that he was mortally wounded in this campaign (1 Ki 22:34-37; see also: 2 Ch 18:33-34).

Similarly to his grandfather Jehoshaphat, it appears that the king of Judah - Ahaziah the son of Jehoram (c. 843-842 BC):

וילך את-יורם בן-אחאב, למלחמה עם-חזאל מלך-ארם-ברמת גלעד; ויכו ארמים את-יורם.

“And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-gilead; and the Arameans wounded Joram” (2 Ki 8:28; see also: 2 Ch 22:5).

It is again not clear in which hands Ramoth-gilead was left after this war. Although like his father Ahab, Joram was wounded in the battle, yet unlike his father he survived and we read:
וישב יורם המלך להתרפא ביזרעאל, מן-המכים אשר יכהו ארמים ברמה בהלחמו את-חזאל מלך ארם;

“And king Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Arameans had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Aram” (2 Ki 8:29).

We are also told that prior to his wounding:

ויורם היה שמר ברמת גלעד, הוא וכל-ישראל, מפני חזאל מלך-ארם.

“And Joram had been guarding Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, from Hazael king of Aram” (2 Ki 9:14).

At this time the Prophet Elisha sent a young Prophet to Ramoth-gilead to anoint Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi who was one of the captains of Joram, as the next king of Israel and to order Jehu:

והכיתה-את-בית אחאב אדניך ; ונקמתי דמי עבדי הנביאים, ודמי כל-עבדי יהוה-מיד
איזבל.
ואבד כל-בית אחאב;

“And you shall smite the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of *YHWH*, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish” (2 Ki 9:7-8).

While Jehu was conspiring against Joram, the king was wounded by the Arameans and relocated to Jezreel to recuperate (2 Ki 9:15). Therefore Jehu had to change his plans. Apparently he left the Israelites that were defending Ramoth-gilead from the Aramean king Hazael, and rode a horse to Jezreel, where he shot Joram with an arrow that went through his heart (2 Ki 9:24).

While Jehu may have been a better devotee of the Israelite’s religion than Joram was, yet he proved to be a weaker defender of the Israelites.

We read that in the days of the king of Israel Jehu (c. 842-814 BC):

בימים ההם-החל יהוה לקצות בישראל ; ויכס חזאל בכל-גבול ישראל.
מן-הירדן מזרח השמש, את כל-ארץ הגלעד, הגדי והראובני והמנשי-מערער אשר על-נחל
ארנון, והגלעד והבשן.

“In those days *YHWH* began to cut Israel short; and Hazael smote them in all the borders of Israel:

From the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the valley of Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan” (1 Ki 10:32-33).



Ivory inlay possibly depicting Hazael of Damascus

The Aramean king Hazael (c. 842-800 BC), had turned Aram-Damascus into a major regional power and conquered large part of Syria and Canaan. He was strong enough to repeal attacks by the Assyrians. According to the Book of Kings After taking the town of Gath, he considered storming Jerusalem (2 Ki 12:18-19).

It was years earlier, before Hazel became the Aramean king, that the Prophet Elisha explained to him why he was crying:

ויאמר כי-ידעתי את אשר-תעשה לבני ישראל רעה, מבצריהם תשלח באש ובחריהם בחרב תהרג, ועלליהם תרטש והרתיהם תבקע.

“Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt you set on fire, and their young men wilt you slay with the sword, and will dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their women with child” (2 Ki 8:12).

Whether, indeed decimated by Hazael, or exiled, or assimilated (as indicated by verse 1 Ch 5:25), it appears that these tribes were no more, never to be mentioned again in the Book of Kings.

The Book of Kings also tells us that about a century later, “**Pul the king of Assyria**” who came to the land in the days of “**Menahem the son of Gadi**” King of Israel (c. 747-737 BC), left after receiving a thousand talents of silver from Menahem (2 Ki 15:19-20). However, there is no mention here of carrying away of people.

Few verses later we read that Menahem’s son Pekahiah, was murdered by Pekah the son of Remaliah, his captain, who was helped by “**fifty men of the Gileadites**”, yet their tribal association is not mentioned.



Tiglath-Pileser III: stela from the walls of his palace (British Museum, London)

The Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III (who also carried the name Pulu) took Damascus in 732 BC and brought an end to the Aramean kingdom.

According to the Book of Kings, in the days of the king of Israel Pekah (c. 734-732 BC):

בימי פקח מלך-ישראל, בא תגלת פלאסר מלך אשור, ויקח את-עיון ואת-אבל בית-מעכה ואת-ינוח ואת-קדש ואת-חצור ואת-הגלעד ואת-הגלילה, כל ארץ נפתלי; ויגלם אשורה.
“In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maacah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria” (2 Ki 15:29).

While the Gilead is mentioned here it is not specified who lived there.

Similar information is given by the Chronicler:

וימעלו באלהי אבתיהם; ויזנו אחרי אלהי עמי-הארץ.
ויער אלהי ישראל את-רוח פול מלך-אשור, ואת-רוח תלגת פלנסר מלך אשור, ויגלם לראובני ולגדי ולחצי שבט מנשה; ויביאם לחלח וחבור והרא, ונהר גוזן, עד היום הזה.
“And they broke faith with the God of their fathers, and went astray after the gods of the peoples of the land.

And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tillegath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river of Gozan, to this day” (1 Ch 5:25-26).

The Chronicler tells us that Tiglath-pileser indeed exiled the people of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh who earlier “**broke faith with the God of their fathers**” and “**went astray after the gods of the peoples of the land.**” It is possible that as the Chronicler indicated, that at that time they were already assimilated among the Arameans, and therefore the writer of verse 2 Ki 15:29 did not bother to tell us who the Gileadites of his day were.

Already in the Book of Joshua we read:

וישבו וילכו בני-ראובן ובני-גד וחצי שבט המנשה, מאת בני ישראל משלה, אשר בארץ-כנען-ללכת אל-ארץ הגלעד, אל-ארץ אחזתם אשר נאחזו-בה, על-פי יהוה ביד-משה.
“And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the commandment of *YHWH* by the hand of Moses” (Jos 22:9; see also: Jos 22:13, 15, 32; Jud 20:1; 1 Sam 13:7).

This verse suggests that at some point “Gilead” became the generic name of the land of the Israelites east of the Jordan.

In the Book of Judges we read:

ויאמרו-מי אחד משבטי ישראל אשר לא-עלה אל-יהוה המצפה; והנה לא בא-איש אל-המחנה, מיביש גלעד-אל-הקהל.
“And they said: What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to the *YHWH* to Mizpah?’ And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly” (Jos 21:8; see also: Jud 5:17; 21:5).

Here **יביש גלעד** - “**Jabesh-gilead**” is referred to as “one of the tribes of Israel.” Furthermore, none of the biblical entries about **יביש גלעד** - “**Jabesh-gilead**” is associated with the tribes of Reuben, Gad or Manasseh.

We may conclude that not only the Israelites territories east of the Jordan became at some point known as “Gilead”, the Israelites there, were now considered as belonging to one tribe.

On the other hand the references to **ראמת בגלעד** - “**Ramoth in Gilead**” in the Books of Deuteronomy and Joshua (but not in the Book of Kings or in the 2nd Book of Chronicles) ascribe this place to the tribe of Gad (Deu 4:43; Jos 20:8; 21:36). We also find verses such as:

ועברים עברו את-הירדן, ארץ גד וגלעד;

“**Now some of the Hebrews had gone over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead**” (1 Sam 13:7).

In the Book of Chronicles we read: **ובני-גד לנגדם, ישבו בארץ הבשן-עד-סלכה** - “**And the sons of Gad dwelt over against them, in the land of Bashan to Salcah**” (1 Ch 5:11).

This statement suggests that by the days of the Chronicler, the knowledge about the specific location of the lands allocated to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh east of the Jordan had faded away. Therefore, it is a small wonder that the traditional understanding about the geography of the Gilead and the Bashan is unrealistic, and is not supported by the biblical texts.